VISIT…

Cliffhangers Adventures

Equinox

Episode 1: Appearance

by Daneen McDermott

Equinox is a short adventure for four 7th-level characters. The party may consist of any mix of classes. The adventure should prove a reasonable challenge for characters from 6th to 8th level and can be set in any campaign world.

Adventure Background

There are fleeting places in this world, places that are no more lasting than a shadow. Legend holds that the most fleeting among those eldritch places is a building that exists for only 12 hours on two days of the year: the spring and fall equinoxes. Reports about what the building contains vary greatly: Some say it's a monastery; others, a library; still others are convinced it's a temple. But all these different reports agree on one item: On the equinox, the building appears on a high hill when the first rays of dawn strike the tip of a tall white tower (twin to a black tower opposite it), and it disappears the same day at sunset when the last light leaves the twin black tower.

Hooking the Characters

If the characters are traveling on the spring or fall equinox, the building may appear on a nearby hill at dawn. If they are staying in a town, they could start to hear reports of a mysterious building that appeared this morning (equinox morning) outside of town. The locals should appear superstitious of the obviously magical place, and authorities could even commission the adventurers to check it out, to make sure it's not a threat to the town.

The Building

Even from a distance, the white and black towers command your attention on the otherwise gray building. The stone building is square, 60 feet on a side. The main section is two stories high. On each of the north corners, 20-foot-diameter towers rise another 40 feet above the main building.

The Walls

As the characters approach the building, they find that the "gray" walls are actually made of black (obsidian) and white (alabaster) square stones set in a seemingly random pattern. The northwest tower is made of the same stones -- all in black -- and the northeast tower all in white stones.

For the DM: Climbing the walls is an EL 3 encounter. The stones are magically electrified: Each stone is trapped to electrify characters depending on their alignment. White stones are trapped to electrify good characters, black stones electrify evil characters. The trapped stones do not affect neutral characters. A Climb check (DC 25) is needed to climb the walls.

Electrified Stone Trap: CR 3; no attack roll necessary, electrical damage 4d8; Reflex save (DC 14) for half; Search (DC 25); Disable Device (DC 25 for each stone);

The Doors (EL3)

On the exterior of the building, in the center of the south wall, are two huge wooden doors (10 foot high by 5 foot wide, each). The left door is black (magical carved ebony) and the right door is white (magical carved pale beech). Good characters will see their own likeness in the black door; Evil characters will see their likeness in the white door. (Neutral characters will see their likeness in both doors.)

Straddling both doors is a single, mithral, yellow-gold circle (1-foot diameter) overlaid on the left edge with a silvery crescent acting as a seal for the doors.

Trap: electrified doors. Any evil character touching the black door receives an electric shock (4d8 points of electrical damage); Reflex save (DC 14) for half; Search (DC 30); Disable Device (DC 30). Any good character touching the white door suffers the same effect. Neutral characters are unaffected by the trap.

Above the doors is an inscription:

For every light there is a shadow
For every night there is a day.
Seek balance in all you do
And wisdom in all you say.

Inset above the inscription is another much larger yellow-gold and silvery circle crescent (magical and mithral). This one is 10 feet in diameter and brightly reflects any light that falls upon it.

The Cliffhanger

The Grand Hall behind the black and white doors is fifty feet deep. A pathway 10 feet wide immediately ahead is lit with a golden beam of light from a source above the door (the backside of the mithral sun/moon). The light reveals a large checkerboard pattern of black and white on the floor. The rest of the room is dark, but characters can make out that it's 40 feet wide. Those with low light or darkvision can see the outline of some large figures standing just inside the dark part of the room….

Equinox

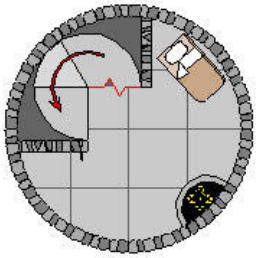
Episode 2: Pawn Pushing

by Daneen McDermott

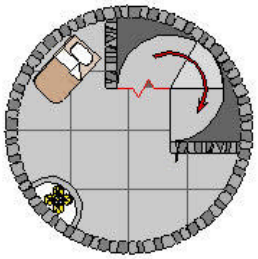
Adventure Background

In the previous installment, the party discovered a strange building with twin towers that appeared mysteriously overnight, during the equinox.

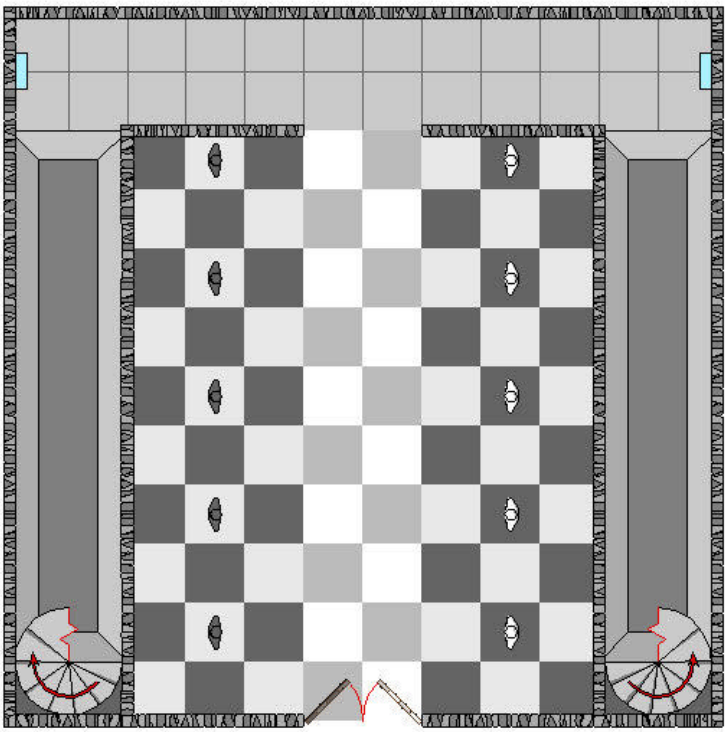
Third Floor (Towers)



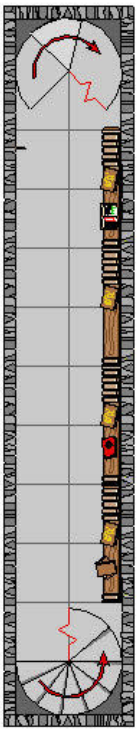
West Tower



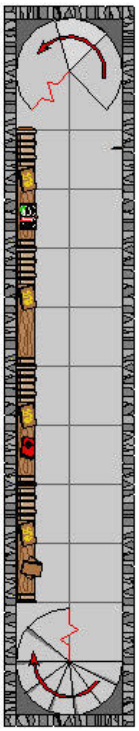
East Tower



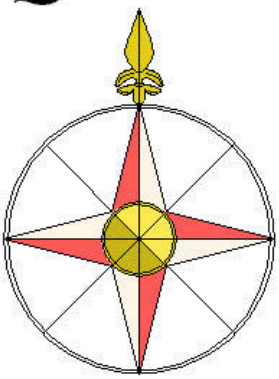
First Floor (The Grand Hall)



Second Floor (The Library)



EQUINOX



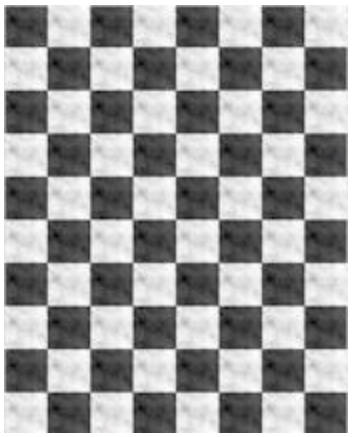
1 square = 5 feet

The Grand Hall Floor (EL2)

The Grand Hall is 40 feet wide and 50 feet deep. The ceiling is vaulted more than 25 feet above. It's laid out in a black and white checkerboard pattern. The central golden corridor is so brightly lit, the side 15 feet appear almost dim. Those with darkvision or low light vision notice the two rows of statues immediately.

Shifting Floor Trap: (CR 7) Stepping on any black 5-foot square on the checkerboard floor causes the whole row of tiles (left to right) to shift 5 feet to the right (it takes one round to complete the movement). Stepping on any white square causes the row to shift 5 feet to the left. Characters stopping or standing still (or fighting) on a sliding row must make an easy Balance check (DC 10). Characters trying to continue moving while the floor shifts under them will need to make a Balance check of DC 15. Anything or anyone on an outside square when it shifts under a side wall will stop against the wall and end up in the adjacent square to where they started.

The golden light from the mithral medallion continues to shine down the direct center of the room, regardless of how the floor changes. The light is magical, and equivalent to natural sunlight. The light does extinguish (nullifying the statue trap) as the sun begins to set, but the building only continues to exist for another 10 minutes from that moment.



Note to DM: It is important to keep track of the movement and end locations of the rows of checkered tiles. Use the map provided, or make your own 8-inch strips and use them on your battlemat (photocopying a chessboard is one solution). Take an entire row and slide it (and all the miniatures on it) without having to refigure the color and contents of each square. Don't pull them up once you're done with this room, though. You will still need to know how they ended up.

The Ten Statues (EL7)

Five black, large, catlike statues watch the golden corridor from 10 feet away on the left. Five white dog statues mirror them, standing guard on the right. If any statue is hit for at least 1 point of damage or is directly illuminated by the magical golden light, that statue springs to life as a displacer beast (black statue) or a blink dog (white statue) and will try to prevent the characters from passing through the hall. The blink dogs are intelligent and know how the floor works and will use the floor mechanism to try and awaken its kin -- but be careful not to awaken its natural enemy. If one or more displacer beasts and one or more blink dogs are awakened at the same time, as natural enemies, they will try to fight each other and (mostly) ignore the party members.

Displacer Beasts [5]: 48 hp each; see *Monster Manual*, page 59.

Blink Dogs [5]: 29 hp each; see *Monster Manual,* page 26.

The Cliffhanger

In the north wall, at the end of the golden corridor, is a 10-foot doorway that leads to a 10-foot wide, east-west hallway. As the characters enter the hallway and turn to look, they see a figure, 25 feet away, striding toward them.

Equinox

Episode 3: Mirror rorriM

by Daneen McDermott

Adventure Background

In the previous installments, the party entered a strange building with twin towers that appeared mysteriously overnight, during the equinox. Inside, they found traps that seemed geared to keep both good and evil people away, and contended with a chessboard populated by pawns that weren't happy about being pushed around. They now face their own worst enemy.

The Mirrors (EL7*)

At each end of the east-west hallway, stands a 5-foot high, 3-foot wide *mirrors of opposition* (see the *Dungeon Master's Guide,* page 222). The mirrors are active; if the command word is not spoken, characters looking into the mirror will face (and be pressed to fight) exact duplicates of themselves. Note that each mirror can produce up to four duplicates every day.

For the DM: The command word to deactivate the mirror on the east is "sun." The word for the mirror on the west wall is "moon." The circle-crescent medallions are the only clues for this.

***Note:** The actual encounter level for each mirror should be the level of the character duplicated. If two or more mirror-duplicates are activated in the same combat, the encounter level should be the average level of the duplicated characters plus the number of duplicates faced.

The Pits (EL 4)

Around the next corner is a 10-foot wide, 50-foot long corridor, with 10-foot high ceilings but no floor. If any of the rows of tiles from the Grand Hall were left slid under the wall into this space, then you will have a patchwork floor over a long, deep pit. These stone tiles still react identically to the floor in the Grand Hall, sliding as characters step on them. The pit is 60 feet deep. The bottom stair at the far end of the corridor is 45 feet away. The circular stairs at the other end of the corridor start at ground level and go up, not down.

The west pit is composed entirely of black stone, and the walls and bottom are covered with oil, making them slippery (Climb check DC 35).

Electrified Floor Trap: (CR 3) The black stone floor is magically trapped to electrify evil characters (4d8 points of electrical damage); Reflex save (DC 19) for half. The floor shocks any evil character touching it once every round of contact. The east pit is white stone and also covered with oil. Likewise, the white stone floor is magically trapped to electrify good characters.

The Library (EL8)

The stairs climb 12 feet to reach another long, narrow hallway. The hallway is lined with

bookcases. The titles of books in the east corridor are all about goodness, virtue, healing, light, and honor. The titles of books in the west corridor are about destruction, war, vivisection, hell, and devils. A Search check (DC 25) reveals a holy tome of Heironeous (east) or Hextor (west) as well as 1d4 books of note, worth 1,000 gp each.

If any character attempts to remove a book, or touches any object on the bookcase, a swarm of books (tiny and small animated objects) will leap from the bookshelves and attack the characters.

Tiny animated object, book (12): 3hp each; special movement: fly 40 ft. (clumsy), see *Monster Manual*, page 17.

Small animated object, book (1): 8hp; special movement: fly 50 ft. (clumsy), see *Monster Manual*, page 17.

The Cliffhanger

On the wall, by the far end of the bookcase is a lever, currently set in a middle position. Pushing the lever up or down will cause the nearby staircase to start to turn in a correspondingly clockwise or counter-clockwise direction -- a mechanical action looking not entirely unlike a overgrown meat-grinder.

Equinox

Episode 4: Meat Grinder

by Daneen McDermott

Adventure Background

In the previous installments, the party entered a strange building with twin towers that appeared mysteriously overnight, during the equinox. Inside, they found traps that seemed geared to keep both good and evil people away, contended with a chessboard populated by pawns that weren't happy about being pushed around. Now they face a mechanical trap.

Corkscrew Staircase (EL6)

The tower stairs are not stairs at all, but ramps that spiral 35 feet up the tower. But there are large 5-foot gaps in the ramps (a total of three gaps in each staircase, each right above the other). Large stone wedgelike protrusions jut out from the wall (three black on the west staircase; three white on the east staircase) and block the way up the ramp. An observant character will discover (Spot check, DC 15) that the protrusions coincide with (and slip through) the gaps in the ramp when the ramp is turning.

Electrified Stair Trap: (CR 3), no attack roll necessary. Like the walls and doors, the black protrusions are magically trapped to electrify evil characters (4d8 points of electrical damage); Reflex save (DC 14) for half. The white protrusions are magically trapped to electrify good characters.

The nearby lever not only makes the ramps turn clockwise (up) and counter-clockwise (down), but also can stop the movement of the ramp if put back in the middle. Unfortunately for the PCs, there is an identical lever at the top of the ramp. Once the monk above detects the ramp is moving to allow someone up, he will wait 1d4+1 rounds and then pull and hold the other lever and reverse the corkscrew's direction. This causes the lower lever to return to the neutral middle position. It will take an opposed Strength check (verses the monk) to reverse the ramp's direction again.

In order to use the wedges to get past the gaps, the characters must turn the ramp and get it to stay in just the right position. If they attempt this while ramp is still moving, the west ramp (which ascends in a clockwise direction) must be turning clockwise, and the east ramp (which ascends in a counterclockwise direction) must be turning counterclockwise.

Anyone caught between the protrusions and the ramp, when it is turning in the wrong direction, suffers 5d8 points of crushing damage on top of any electrical damage caused by contact with the wedge.

The Final Battle (EL9)

At the top of the tower is a 20-foot-diameter round room with a 20-foot-high ceiling. A half-celestial/half-fiend monk lives here. This character has a commanding presence and large leathery wings that end in feathers.

The monk says the following to the first character to enter:

"You must have achieved balance to get this far, but to demonstrate wisdom, you really ought to go."

Good and evil characters who do not leave immediately face combat with the winged monk. Neutral characters may be able to negotiate an exchange of goods or services with this figure.

Note to DM: On the first round of combat, the monk drinks a *potion of haste* and casts *darkness* into the room.

East Tower Monk male half-celestial/half-fiend Mnk7: CR 9; medium-size humanoid; HD 7d8+21; hp 53; Init +4; Spd 50 ft.; fly 50 ft (average); AC 24; Atk +9/+6 melee (unarmed), +9 bite; SQ Spell-like abilities; poison, acid, cold, disease and electricity immunity, fire resistance 20, low-light vision, darkvision 60 ft.; AL LN; SV Fort +10, Ref +9, Will +8; Str 19, Dex 17, Con 16, Int 12, Wis 13, Cha 17.
Skills and Feats: Bluff +11, Diplomacy +13, Move Silently +13; Unarmed Strike, stunning attack, evasion, deflect arrows, still mind, slow fall (30 ft), purity of body, improved trip, wholeness of body, leap of the clouds.

Special Qualities: Spell-like Abilities: 1/day -- *desecrate, bless, aid, detect evil, cure serious wounds, neutralize poison, unholy blight, holy smite, remove disease*; 3/day -- *darkness, protection from evil, poison*.

Possessions: *ghost touch chain shirt*; *brooch of shielding*; *+2 cloak of resistance; +3 ring of protection*; *necklace of fireballs* (7d6, 5d6 (x2), 3d6 [x3]).

West Tower Monk female half-fiend/half-celestial Mnk7: CR 10; Medium-size Humanoid; HD 7d8+14; hp 45; Init +4; Spd 50 ft.; fly 50 ft (average); AC 25; Atk +9/+6 melee (unarmed), +9 bite; SQ Spell-like abilities; poison, acid, cold, disease and electricity immunity, fire resistance 20, low-light vision, darkvision 60 ft.; AL LN; SV Fort +9, Ref +10, Will +8; Str 18, Dex 19, Con 15, Int 12, Wis 13, Cha 17.
Skills and Feats: Bluff +11, Diplomacy +13, Move Silently +14; Unarmed Strike, stunning attack, evasion, deflect arrows, still mind, slow fall (30 ft), purity of body, improved trip, wholeness of body, leap of the clouds.

Special Qualities: Spell-like Abilities: 1/day -- *desecrate, bless, aid, detect evil, cure serious wounds, neutralize poison, unholy blight, holy smite, remove disease;* 3/day -- *darkness, protection from evil, poison*.
Possessions, *ghost touch chain shirt; brooch of shielding; +2 cloak of resistance; +3 ring of protection; necklace of fireballs* (8d6, 6d6, 4d6, 2d6 [x3]).

The monks' cots, if searched, contain 2d4 x 100 gp, 1d8 gems (worth 500 each), and three *potions of haste*.

The most interesting feature of the room is a semi-circular well permanently affixed to the floor opposite the stairs. On the top of the well is a shimmering portal. Five inches above the portal surface hangs suspended an ornate four-panned scale. Each pan holds a large magical book. It's obvious that lifting one book will cause the other three to dip through the portal. If a book disappears into a portal, the book is lost (the pan comes back up empty).

The books are:

1. *+2 Tome of Understanding*
2. +2 *Manual of Quickness of Action*
3. *Book of Exalted Deeds* (in the east tower) or *Book of Vile Darkness* (in the west tower)
4. *Tome of Opposite Alignment* (like a *Helm of Opposite Alignment*, but has no effect on neutral characters).

For the DM: The well is a *Well of Many Worlds* (see the *Dungeon Master's Guide*, page 228). The west tower well leads to strange world that has neither sun nor moon, but is dominated by monsters accustomed to this unusual condition. The east leads to a world that has a sun much like the world the PCs came from, but when the sun sets, a smaller sun rises, making it a world that is always bathed in light. Although the *well* is a two-way portal, if the characters are on the other side of the portal when the building disappears at sunset, the portal access on the other plane also disappears.

The Cliffhanger

The characters had better not linger too long when sunset approaches. As the sun starts to set, the building and all its contents begin to fade from existence, becoming increasingly shadowy and transparent. They will have 10 rounds from the time the towers begin to disappear until the sun has fully set before the building vanishes entirely. Any characters still in the building remain trapped within it and will return intact in exactly six months.